

# THE RELATION BETWEEN TEACHER'S SELF-DISCLOSURE AND STUDENT'S MOTIVATION TO LEARN

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## Abstract

Teacher communication with students is an essential part of successful and inspiring teaching and learning process. Usually researches distinguish teacher immediacy and self-disclosure as the most influencing factors of teacher communication related to student's motivation to learn. Most of the studies pay attention to immediacy created by the teacher in the class and its relation to students' motivation. However, little is known about teacher's disclosure influence on students' motivation to learn. So, the aim of this literature review is to analyze the peculiarities of teacher's self-disclosure and its relation to students' motivation to learn.

The literature review has shown that teacher's self-disclosure may be an effective instrument for the teachers to motivate students to learn. The review has also shown that teacher's self-disclosure should be relevant and appropriate in the current situation – teacher always has to make a decision: to disclose or not.

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**Keywords:** Self-Disclosure, Teacher-Student Relation, Motivation to Learn

## Introduction

Nowadays we can generally hear saying that school has stopped being the second home for children. In the media we can also find a lot of information about that lots of students are missing lessons at school or that their participation in the class is low (Hafen, Allen, Mikami, Gregory, Hamre & Pianta, 2012).

The biggest part of the time at school students spend while communicating with their teachers and friends and this communication affects their cognitive and emotional development (Wang & Dishion, 2012). Thus, it is possible to say that teacher's communication with students is very important in their general development. It is also said that teachers'

communication with students is an essential part of the educational process (Punyanunt-Carter, 2006; Richmond, 1990) which motivates and supports a student during the period of his/hers studying. Moreover, students' motivation to learn is called to be an essential part of educational process (Glynn, Aultman & Owens, 2005). These findings draw an importance of teacher's communication with students to their learning. Generally as one of the most important factors concerned with students motivation to learn is distinguished teacher's self-disclosure (Cayanus, Martin & Goodboy, 2009; Cayanus & Martin, 2008).

The majority of authors (e.g., Christophel, 1990; Richmond 1990; Velez & Cano, 2008) while analyzing teacher-student communication process in relation to student's learning motivation talk about immediacy as one of the most influencing factor but not teacher's self-disclosure. However, some researchers note that teacher's self-disclosure is also important factor, which is related to students' motivation to learn (Cayanus, Martin & Goodboy, 2009; Cayanus & Martin, 2008). According to this, it is important to find out how teacher's self-disclosure is associated with students motivation to learn.

Taking that into account, the purpose of this literature review paper is to analyze the relation of teacher's self-disclosure and student's motivation to learn.

### **The Peculiarities of Teacher Self-Disclosure**

Mostly teachers in the classroom spend time by communicating with students about the subject's content, discussing with students about the lesson or sharing their own lives experience (Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2007). In the other words, it is possible to say that generally teachers use self-disclosure in the educational process.

### **The Definition of Teacher's Self-Disclosure**

The term of teacher's self-disclosure doesn't have one actual description. In order to have a better understanding of this term, first of all we will overlook the definition of self-disclosure. The first, classical, definition of self-disclosure was suggested by Jourard (1971) where self-disclosure was defined as the process when a person becomes known to others, involving the attitude of love and trust. However, this definition doesn't pay regard to the development of the relation of the people who are disclosing. In conformity with this, generally self-disclosure is described as a voluntary action when people disclose ones information, thoughts and feelings to other people (Greene, Derlega & Mathews, 2006).

Talking about teacher's self-disclosure, the first definition was suggested by Sorensen (1989) (in Allen & Court, 2009). It was described as

teacher's assertions about oneself which can be or not related with the educational content. Later, Goldstain and Benassi (1994) defined it as teacher's sharing personal and professional information with students and colleagues. Cayanus and Martin (2008) distinguished 3 dimensions of teacher self-disclosure: amount, relevance and negativity. The amount of disclosure explains how much and how often teacher uses self-disclosure in the class; relevance includes disclosure which is concerned with the theme of discussion in the class; negativity is associated with negative disclosures to the class.

Later in this paper the definition of self-disclosure suggested by Goldstain and Benassi will be used, but only in relation to pupils.

### **The Process of Teacher's Self-Disclosure**

As it was mentioned above, self-disclosure isn't a static phenomenon (Fien, 1997; James, 2009). It is dynamic process which generally is explained by social penetration theory, suggested by Altman and Taylor (1973) (in Harper & Harper, 2006) and Tolsdtedt and Stokes (1983). According to this theory, self-disclosure is a two-dimensional construct, composed by its depth (the intimacy of disclosed information) and breadth (the variety of discussed themes). Authors note that the deeper and the more breadth of self-disclosure leads to better interpersonal relationship. Later, Chaudoir and Fisher (2010) added the dimension of time, which makes self-disclosure restricted in time.

However, the process of teacher's self-disclosure is the best explained by decision making model. By this model, the focal attention is paid to the teacher's disclosure which emerges through realizing teaching/educational program at school (Zhang, Shi, Tonelson & Robinson, 2009). Similarly James (2009) points out that teacher's decision to disclose oneself attitudes is based on decision to include himself or herself into the educational program. Therefore teacher's disclosure in the educational process is comprehensible as informal feature, which is associated with physical, social and intellectual circumstances (Zhang, Shi, Tonelson & Robinson, 2009). Goldstain and Benassi (1997) notes that teacher's self-disclosure can come through discussions, the content of the lesson or answering questions asked by students. According to this, teacher has to make a decision whether: the disclosure is understandable for students, relevant at the moment of disclosure (Zhang, Shi, Tonelson & Robinson, 2009), and corresponds with the norms of the class (Goldstain & Benassi, 1994). Before disclosing to the class teacher also should assess cultural aspects, students gender, their emotional state and their level of the learning (Zhang, Shi, Tonelson & Robinson, 2009).

Differently from Cayanus and Martin, Eckhart (2011) distinguishes 7 dimensions describing teacher's self-disclosure. They are: relevance, valence, amount, discreetness, character, intention and place. In conformity with these dimensions, it is true to say that teacher should balance with all variants of disclosure and assess its acceptance. James (2009) called it as the dilemma of teacher's disclosure when teacher has to decide if the disclosure is appropriate in the particular situation or not.

### **The Advantages and Disadvantages of Teacher's Self-Disclosure**

Teacher self-disclosure has negative and positive impact to students (Cayanus, 2004; Eckhart, 2011; Goldstein & Benassi, 1994).

Generally authors, analyzing the advantages of teacher's disclosure, note that it creates a positive classroom environment (e.g., Allen & Court, 2009; Antaki, 2005). It is said that self-disclosure helps teacher to build positive relation with students and helps to create informal atmosphere in the classroom. However, by disclosing personal information teacher takes a risk of being misunderstood (Ejsing, 2007). Likewise to that, Cayanus and Martin (2008) note that teacher's disclosure helps to form the relation between student and teacher and makes teacher likeable. But it is important to mention that teacher's egocentric aims shouldn't be allowed in the educational system (Allen & Court, 2009).

The other advantage of teacher self-disclosure is that it motivates students to participate in the classroom activities (Cayanus, 2004; Goldstain & Benassi, 1994). It is thought that it creates the reciprocity between teacher and students where students feel accepted, self-confident and free to discuss (Allen & Court, 2009). Nevertheless, according to Eckhart (2011), while disclosing teachers should be cautious because disclosed information about illegal teacher activities, doxy or sexual standpoint may decrease student's participation in the class and motivation to learn. On the one hand, it is also possible to say that students show better participation in the classroom because the subject content becomes more comprehensible for them if teacher uses self-disclosure (Cayanus & Martin, 2004). On the other hand, if teacher's disclosure doesn't involve the content of the subject, it will disorientate students (Tucker, 2012).

### **The Peculiarities of Student's Motivation to Learn**

In this paper, motivation to learn or learning motivation is defined as internal psychological process (Keller, 2008; Lee, 2010), which stimulates the student to see learning as a value (Combs, Luthans & Griffith, 2009; Glynn, Aultman & Owens, 2005; Keller, 2008) and to take actions while reaching learning goals (Ames & Archer, 1988; Glynn, Aultman & Owens, 2005; Keller, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

## **The Main Theories of Learning Motivation and its Changes with Student's Age**

Usually learning motivation is explained by humanistic, behavioral, social and cognitive paradigms (Glynn, Aultman & Owens, 2005; Lee, 2010). By the humanists, the need becomes the most important factor affecting learning motivation. This paradigm emphasizes the importance of internal motivation which arises from the needs of one's freedom and self-growth (Glynn, Aultman & Owens, 2005). In the behaviorism, motivation to learn is thought to be an external form of motivation where the reward takes the most important part (Lee, 2010). According to cognitive paradigm, motivation comes from interpretations of objective facts (Schunk, 2000) which generally are the result of the interaction of a person and environment. The social paradigm also points out the importance of interaction between human and surroundings; however, here the most important factor is modeling, but not interpretation (Lee, 2010).

There are a lot of theories of motivation but it is thought that motivation to learn can be the best explained by goal orientation and self-determination theories.

According to self-determination theory (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991) students' motivation to the academic performance arises from one's needs and desires. Students' motivation to learn grows through the process of internalization when learning becomes a value (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In the goal oriented theory, the main aspect is to reach the learning goals (Ames & Archer, 1988). Learning goals generally characterize reaching knowledge and personal interest (Ames, 1992). It is important to note that goal oriented theory, differently from self-determination, emphasizes the influence of environment because the motivation to learn arises from connection between student's goals and the surrounding (Vedder-Weis & Fortus, 2011).

Motivation is a dynamic and changing process. Children come to school with a high internal motivation to learn and discover things. However, later their motivation has a tendency to decrease (Corpus, McClintic-Hilbert & Hayenga, 2009; Gillet, Vallerand & Lafreniere, 2012; Gottfried, Fleming & Gottfried, 2001; Lepper, Corpus & Iyengar, 2005). Usually the alternation of students' motivation is associated with going from primary school to the secondary one. It is related with decreasing internal and increasing external motivation in students (Gillet, Vallerand & Lafreniere, 2012; Lepper, Corpus & Iyengar, 2005).

In conformity with Harter (1981), the intellection of 5-7 years old children demands on „everything or nothing“ thinking. Thus, it is hard to assess their motivation to learn. At the age of 8-11 years children have more differential thinking what gives them an ability to understand and integrate

the evaluative feedback (Guay, Chanal, Ratelle, Marsh, Larose & Boivin, 2010). Moreover, these children are thought to have more experience in the process of learning what makes their assessment more precise (Decy & Ryan, 2000; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991).

A lot of studies have been organized to discover the age range when motivation to learn changes. One of the first researches' has been made by Harter (1981). Harter used his own scale of internal and external motivation for school-aged children. According to his study, internal motivation at the age of 8-14 years has a tendency to decrease. Later Harter's scale has been criticized because it asks to remember the exact behavior related to internal or external motivation (Corpus, McClintic-Gilbert & Hayenga, 2009), therefore in further researchers the improved scale of Harter had been used. For example, Lepper and colleagues (2005) note that motivation to learn decreases from 8 to 12 years; Corpus and others (2009) in their longitudinal study indicates that internal motivation decrease at 8-13 years; by the study of Gillet and colleagues (2012) motivation decreases at the of 9-12 years and about 15 years it stabilizes and starts to increase.

Supposedly, this decline of motivation is caused by the age of adolescence when the most important goal is not learning but formatting the relationships, demonstration of responsibility, efforts to be popular (Mansfield & Wosnitza, 2010). So, it is possible to say that motivation to learn decreases not only because of changing schools, but also because of the period of adolescence when peer relationships becomes one of the most important goals (Gillet, Vallerand & Lafreniere, 2012).

### **Factors Motivating Students to Learn**

As it was mentioned above, students motivation to learn is associated with both: individual and environmental factors (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991; Klein, Noe & Wang, 2006; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

1) Individual Factors. It is said that a student, who is able to learn, is interested in the content of the subject and keeps the education as a value should be motivated to learn (Hardre, 2006; Williams & Williams, 2011). More importantly, self-confidence about ones abilities to perform well in the classroom and complete the given exercises is one of key factors of student's motivation to learn (Legault, Green-Demers & Pelletier, 2006). Groham and Christophel (1992) also note that student has a higher motivation to learn if he or she perceives the learning as useful in the future.

2) Enviromental Factors. Agreeably to Hardre (2006), teacher, as environmental factor, influences students' learning motivation the most. According to Skinner and Belmont (1993), the expression of emotions and the development of warm relations in the classroom create a positive effect

for students' motivation to learn. It is also important for the teacher to support the students in the process of learning (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Hardre, 2006; Moss & Honkomp, 2011). Finally, only a teacher who is able verbally and non-verbally communicate with students can afford students' motivation to learn and their active participation in the class (Klein, Noe, Wang, 2006). In other words, teacher has to show students that learning isn't a boring process (Gillet, Vallerand & Lafreniere, 2012; Williams & Williams, 2011).

Gorham and Christophel (1992) accomplished the research in case to analyze the main aspects of teacher activities which promotes students' motivation. Authors called them as motivators and demotivators. According to the study, the main motivators are: effective work during lessons, inspiration, interest in students, respect, and politeness. Williams and Williams (2011) also points out that learning content should be stimulating and related with students needs. The main demotivators are: boring, static, disorganized and not well prepared teacher. If a teacher works as demotivator, the students will get nervous and their motivation to learn will decrease (Legault, Green-Demers & Pelletier, 2006). Moreover, motivation to learn will also decrease if teacher is ambiguous in the evaluation of the students and in the explanation of the exercises (Gorham & Christophel, 1992).

It is also important to mention that the methods teacher use in the class to teach students has an effect on their learning motivation too (Williams & Williams, 2011). The methods should be innovative, interesting for students, encouraging learning, useful and practically checked as more as possible. Some of the authors (e.g., Klein, Noe & Wang, 2006; Rau, Gao & Wu, 2008) suggest to integrate the new technologies into the educational process in order to improve students' motivation to learn.

According to the Deci and colleagues (1991), the ideal school system should stimulate students' enthusiasm to learn and include them into the process of learning and teaching. Authors note that the best way here is to reward students for the accepted behavior. However, Harder (2006) maintains that reward in the activity which is attractive to the student decreases his or her interest in it when the reward is discontinued. For students it is important to feel the dependency to social systems (for example, school system) and ability to influence it (for example, to be the part of school's board) (Doll, Spies, LeClair, Kurien & Foley, 2010).

Overall, it is also important to mention that another significant environmental factor is autonomy and support for the student at school and at home (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991; Harder, 2006; Williams & Williams, 2011).

## **The Relation of Teacher's Self-Disclosure to Student's Motivation to Learn**

Good teacher's communication skills are an essential part of successful teaching and learning process (Punyanunt-Carter, 2006; Richmond, 1990). Educators usually want their students to do the exercises they are given, to be active and responsible. To reach this, teachers use different kind of techniques which can be motivating, negative or without any effect to students' performance (Richmond, 1990).

While analyzing teacher and student interpersonal relationships and motivation to learn, mostly it is talked about immediacy but not self-disclosure (e.g., Christophel, 1990; Richmond, 1990; Velez & Cano, 2008). Immediacy can be defined as a psychological closeness (Christophel, 1990) which, commonly to self-disclosure, can be verbal or non-verbal. It is maintained as such kind of verbal or non-verbal teacher's behavior which helps to reduce the distance between teacher and student can also appear through self-disclosure (Velez & Cano, 2008). Moreover, Hill and colleagues (2008) indicates that using teacher self-disclosure during lessons is as effective as the immediacy. Whenever teacher discloses himself or herself to the students, they see him or her as more accessible and open to the communication (Cayanus & Martin, 2008).

Other authors say that self-disclosure is similar to immediacy (e.g., Velez & Cano, 2008) or can be a part of it (Christophel, 1990; Richmond 1990; Walker, 2011). For instance, Christophel (1990) notes that self-disclosure is a form of immediacy which determines the increase of motivation in the process of learning. According to Velez and Cano (2008), verbal immediacy can be expressed by humor or self-disclosure and openness. It is said that teacher's self-disclosure will increase the immediacy in the class when teacher's disclosure is relevant and appropriate for the exact class (Lannutti & Strauman, 2006). McBride and Wahl (2005) note that teacher self-disclosure is like one of the teacher's communication with students tools which in general is used to catch attention, create confidence and motivate students. Similarly to that, Mazer and colleagues (2007) say that when students know more about their teachers they are more motivated to learn.

As it was mentioned above, teacher's self-disclosure usually appears through the content of the lesson (Cayanus, 2004). In that case it is possible to say that teacher's disclosure through the content of the lesson is a part of the process of learning which characterizes the dimension of relevance (Cayanus, 2004; Cayanus & Martin, 2008). According to Hill and colleagues (2008) and Cayanus with Martin (2008), relevance is an essential part of teacher self-disclosure when we talk about teacher's disclosure influence on students motivation to learn. Moreover, Lannutti and Strauman (2006) note



that disclosures which aren't related to content of the subject may be not accepted by the class and should be avoided. So, teacher shouldn't disclose personal information about his or her family, friends or leisure time (Hill, Ah Yun & Lindsey, 2008). This could be called as the dimension of teacher's self-disclosure negativity what generally demotivates students to learn (Cayanus, 2004; Hill, Ah Yun & Lindsey, 2008). The third dimension of teacher self-disclosure – amount – normally isn't linked to the learning motivation (Hill, Ah Yun & Lindsey, 2008). However, it is possible to say that as more teacher discloses through the content of the lesson, the more students will be motivated to learn (Cayanus & Martin, 2008). Thus, positive and repetitive teacher's self-disclosure through the learning content motivates students to learn (Hill, Ah Yun & Lindsey, 2008).

There are only few studies analyzing the relation between teacher's self-disclosure and students' motivation to learn. For example, the research of Zhang and colleagues (2009) showed that to the teacher's opinion, disclosure is an appropriate instrument to motivate students to learn, to gain their attention, to create confidence in the classroom, to develop moral values. Moreover, Cayanus (2004) explains teacher self-disclosure as an appropriate tool in the class. It can be confirmed by the research of Hill and colleagues (2009). Authors note that teacher's disclosure can be used as an instrument during lessons which is related to: better relationship between teacher and student, growing interest in the subject and its content, greater participation in the class, aspiration to better grades.

It is also important to mention that recently a lot of attention of the researchers' is set to the online or virtual learning (e.g., Harper & Harper, 2006; Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2007; Rau, Gao & Wu, 2008). In general, it is said that while communicating on the Internet, people are used to disclose more than on the face to face communication (Bruss & Hill, 2010; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006). According to this, it is possible to say that teacher's, communicating with students on the distant course, would be likely to disclose more than on the traditional courses. Moreover, Mazer and colleagues (2007) point out that teacher disclosure in the virtual environment stimulates students' confidence and interest in their teachers. In this way, learning process seems to be more interesting and multifarious what motivates students to get knowledge and seek for better grades (Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2007; Rau, Gao & Wu, 2008).

## **Conclusion**

The present review investigated the peculiarities of teacher self-disclosure relation to students' motivation to learn. The literature review has shown that that it is still a little known about this relation because researchers generally are made to analyze the immediacy except self-disclosure. It is true

to say that self-disclosure is also included in some the studies, where authors consider it as a part of self-disclosure (e.g., Christophel, 1990; Richmond 1990). However, it is still not clear how teacher's disclosure as a separate construct affects student's motivation to learn.

Altogether it is possible to say that using teacher self-disclosure in the classroom is effective not only for creating and maintaining warm, close and respectful relationships between teacher and students (Cayanus et al., 2009; Wolker, 2011; Zhang, 2009), but it is also related with students motivation to learn (McCroskey et al., 2006). It is still important to note that teacher's disclosure motivates students to learn just in case if it is relevant, positive and well considered (Cayanus, 2004).

Further studies are needed to investigate the direct teacher's self-disclosure influence on students learning motivation in educational process. Moreover, it would be also meaningful to explore this relation in distant school courses or separate subjects.

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